



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Richmond Hill High School**

**High School 475**

**89- 30 114th Street  
Queens  
NY 11418**

**Principal: Frances DeSanctis**

**Dates of review: April 7 - 8, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Nick Butt**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Richmond Hill is a high school with 3425 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 15% Black, 48% Hispanic, 9% White, and 28% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 - 2007 was 78.0%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

The school is overcrowded and has 22 classrooms in trailers, with no direct access to them from the school building.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal has brought energy and insight to improving the school and enjoys widespread support for her vision.
- The school has refined and deepened its use of data to understand how students are performing.
- Staff have very high expectations of students, who rise to meet them.
- The curriculum has great breadth and is enriched very well by sports and other clubs.
- Skilful scheduling and budgeting enable the faculty to support students very effectively in improving their performance.
- Very positive relationships between staff and students promote a harmonious school atmosphere.
- Teachers are supported particularly well in their professional development to enhance their instruction.
- There are many opportunities for teachers to share good practice and learn from one another.
- The school's guidance services make a big difference in helping students to succeed.
- Extremely effective links with partner organizations contribute greatly to students' development.

### What the school needs to improve

- Explore in more depth how the school's performance compares with similar schools to identify new ways to improve.
- Use data to measure more closely the progress students make from their starting points to set challenging goals for them.
- Make departmental goals more ambitious and refine interim goals to be specific and relevant to each content area.
- Continue to develop ways of engaging students through instruction that fully meets their different learning needs.
- Ensure all goals are objectively measurable so that leaders can easily assess progress towards meeting them.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### Progress made since the last review

The school has made some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

Since the last review, the school has introduced more sophisticated systems for storing and interpreting data and has appointed two new data specialists. The administration is using this information well to focus more closely on the performance of particular subgroups and to shape decisions over staffing and courses. An assistant principal summed up the new approach as, “Don’t look at the forest, start looking at the trees!” The school now includes milestones and timeframes in its plans, but its goals are not always objectively measurable, making it difficult to assess how much progress it has made.

The whole school reflects the principal’s determination to see sustained improvement, with abundant energy and a positive approach to new forms of data. It does not yet compare itself in enough depth with other similar schools to learn how their use of data is accelerating learning. Departmental goals align much more closely with the school’s goals, but these are not ambitious enough. They do not take sufficient account of variations in the performance of different departments, and interim goals do not reflect the specific needs of each content area. Teachers know the performance of their students well, and set goals to help them improve the areas where they show need. They do not yet set individual goals for students based on their starting points, to take account of the progress they should make over time. The school has very high expectations of its students, set out in a contract they sign at the start of each year and reinforced daily by the principal and staff. Even though the school has double the number of students for its physical capacity, it runs as an orderly and purposeful learning community. Relationships between students and staff are very positive, and there is a shared desire for students to make the most of their time in school. Instruction increasingly responds to students’ different learning styles, although sometimes it does not take full account of their levels of achievement. The school’s guidance services equip students very well for the challenges they face and help them to make wise choices for the future. The curriculum gives students many opportunities to pursue the courses that best suit them, and enriches their experiences especially well through a wide variety of clubs.

Teachers value greatly the high quality professional development they receive, which aligns well to their individual needs and to the school’s goals. A good number of teacher facilitators model lessons and share good practice, and study groups discuss issues of interest arising from data. The inquiry team runs well as an engine house of innovation, focusing on the performance and progress of grade nine students in global history. The team’s findings are beginning to influence the school’s wider approach to planning and instruction.

## **How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria**

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school gathers an extensive range of data on its students and has easily accessible databases to analyze and interpret it. Teachers receive more detailed data than before and are able to identify areas where their students need to improve. This has helped teachers to follow especially the progress of special education students and English language learners. Guidance counselors are able to keep track of how close students are to graduating, and where they need to accumulate more credits. Administrators are examining how well different subgroups are performing, analyzing the data by gender and ethnic background. The inquiry team has identified that girls seem to do better in the pilot group it is studying and is investigating the reasons for this. Leaders compare performance by classroom and by subject, and are beginning to look at whole grades. The school has considered its performance in relation to similar schools, but has focused more on schools it outperforms. It has not yet looked in depth at those schools that are stronger in specific areas, where it may be able to apply new approaches to improve its own performance. Teachers are more confident about using data and some of them have set up their own databases and websites to gain an even greater understanding of how well their students are doing.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

Teachers collaborate together well to identify patterns in students' performance and areas where skills need to be revised or refocused. They are only beginning to consider setting goals related to students' progress from specific starting points to ensure that each student's performance is good enough. Certain groups form a particular focus this year, such as Hispanic students in English and math and grade 9 students in global history. Staff are monitoring their progress closely from each marking period and making changes to plans and instruction to accelerate their learning. Greater use of collaborative team teaching is particularly helping Hispanic students to make better progress, and there are also gains in attendance in these classes. Departmental plans align more closely to school goals than was the case at the last review, but leaders have set insufficiently ambitious targets for improvement. The plans do not take enough account of differences in the performance of departments. This means interim goals do not always describe specifically how changes will help content areas to improve.

Students are aware of the school's high expectations of them and work together well to meet them. Incentives such as the "student of the month" promote the school's values, and staff remind students about them often. An automated telephone system gives important messages to parents. Teachers share assessment information with students and show them how to improve. They are devising ways of involving students more in their own learning.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

The school is successful at designing courses that are suited to the interests and aspirations of students, and that meet exam requirements. Students can take a full range of programs, including advanced placements and electives. Leaders have experimented with double-period classes and creative collaborative team teaching to accelerate progress, particularly for struggling ninth graders and Hispanic students. A parent said, “Almost any subject you can think about the school has.” Students benefit from a vast array of extra-curricular activities that include cricket and tennis, mock trials and chess. Electives include African American literature and the history of New York.

Teachers have a shared understanding about how students learn and have done much work in the past year studying what strategies of instruction most engage them. They have found out the learning styles that students prefer. Professional development has focused on differentiating instruction to help students learn more quickly. Most teachers now incorporate these practices into their lessons, so that students often have different tasks to do within a group. A student said, “They bring the work alive by letting us do hands-on activities.” In one lesson that captured students’ attention vividly, the teacher taught them a quadratic formula sung to the tune of “Pop goes the weasel”! Instruction does not yet match tasks fully to students’ different levels of attainment, so sometimes the work is too easy or too difficult for particular students in the same classroom.

The principal and administration use the budget very wisely to make scheduling and staffing decisions that impact most on learning. They have employed additional attendance officers to reduce absence, and given guidance counselors more time to devote to students. Teachers have time assigned to offer tutorials rather than to do routine supervisory tasks that other staff could do. Relationships between students and staff are very positive because of the school’s culture of respect and accountability. Students know that staff are there for them and value the support they receive. Attendance has improved this year because of an increased focus on the students with particular issues, and investment in systems to call home on the first day of absence.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is well developed.**

The work of the Teachers’ Center staff developers makes a valuable contribution to professional development and aligns closely with the school’s goals. Teachers have their own plans for improvement, which combine personal goals with identified areas of need. The principal and assistant principals give clear evaluative feedback to staff on their instruction following observations and snapshots. They also undertake composite observations in each department to gain an overview of how they are functioning. Innovative practices, such as videotaping lessons and playing them back with the teacher, enhance the quality of reflection. New teachers feel supported particularly well by the administration and appreciate the opportunities they have to develop, especially

from their mentors and buddy teachers. Teachers share ideas by visiting one another's classrooms and modeling good practice. Inter-departmental study groups enable staff to discuss the latest research and ways of improving their instruction.

A student said, "There's always someone or some place you can turn to." Even though the school is very large, its highly effective guidance services serve every student's needs. Students also support one another as peer tutors and peer mediators. The pupil personnel team meets regularly to review the support for struggling students and agrees holistic approaches across disciplines to help them. They enjoy a good success rate in getting students back on track. The school runs very smoothly because there are clear policies and procedures that all staff implement consistently. Initiatives such as "hall sweeps" encourage students to arrive for class promptly, and a zero tolerance approach to infractions of the school's dress code creates a purposeful atmosphere. A parent commented, "The principal doesn't let the kids slack off!" Students benefit from the school's many close links with partnership organizations, which support after-school programs, tutoring and curriculum enrichment. These include South Asian Youth Action and Town Hall, which offers stagecraft to woodshop students.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school's plans now include timeframes and milestones. Departments have achieved a new level of consistency in developing improvement plans, but do not yet set interim goals that are objectively measurable. The administration is beginning to consider why some departments appear to be more successful than others in improving students' performance. They do not currently set differentiated goals that reflect these variations. Assistant principals monitor how well teachers are achieving their goals for the year periodically. They focus on teachers who have clearly identified needs.

Teachers are using data increasingly well to measure how effectively their plans and interventions are helping students to improve. Their access to powerful interactive programs means they have a much deeper understanding of skill sets to concentrate on. Their greater knowledge of students' preferred learning styles helps them to modify plans to include strategies that will engage them more. They are introducing music into their classrooms, and making more use of technology and visual stimuli. Leaders make effective decisions based on data to tackle underachievement. This year several pilots with English as a second language students, and the work of the inquiry team in looking at global history in grade 9, are helping students to achieve better outcomes. The appointment of two male guidance counselors is giving positive role models to boys in need of support.

A teacher said the positive approach of the principal and assistant principals, "inspires you to do your best." The principal's upbeat vision for the school, and the momentum gained this year in using data to effect change, commands wide support from the school community. This means the school is well-placed to continue its ascent to new heights in meeting the needs of all its students and in improving their scores.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Richmond Hill High School</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>			X		

### Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?			X		
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?			X		
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?			X		
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?			X		
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?			X		
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?		X			
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			X		

### Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?		X			
2.2 focus on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area?			X		
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?			X		
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?			X		
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			X		

### Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X		

<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					X

<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					X

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>